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Civil War Men in Ranks

Sex

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

**"An inspiring
and informative book
about one man's journey
through cancer to
a healed life."**

— Bernie Siegel, M.D.

"A clear-eyed book that is...wise, and
humbling, and...bears reading before
it is needed."

— Sue Halpern,
New York Daily News

"Rarely if ever has a patient of Price's
writerly gifts taken on the story of
physical devastation.... Fascinating....
Reynolds Price was dying of cancer years
ago. But he, and his writing, have endured
and thrived. *A Whole New Life* [is] Price's
most distinctive and haunting work."

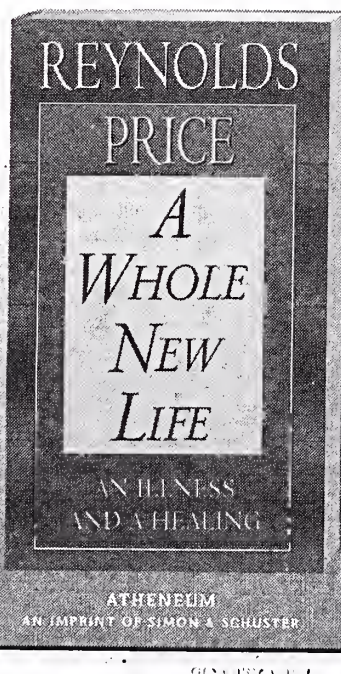
— William A. Henry III,
Time magazine

"A great novelist's broad and deep intelli-
gence, his wisdom, is now brought to
bear on his own life.... All of us...have so
very much to learn from this extraordinary
personal narrative."

— Robert Coles, M.D.

"Courageous... Filled with a poet's
'gorgeous sounds.'"

— Joan Smith,
San Francisco Examiner



Battlefield Confidential

Yes, the author explains, there was sex during the Civil War.

THE STORY THE SOLDIERS WOULDN'T TELL

Sex in the Civil War.

By Thomas P. Lowry.

Illustrated. 240 pp. Mechanicsburg, Pa:
Stackpole Books. \$19.95.

By James I. Robertson Jr.

BACK in the 1930's, Bell Irvin Wiley inter-
viewed a group of Confederate veterans,
seeking to learn something about the pro-
miscuity of Civil War soldiers. An obvious-
ly irritated octogenarian cut off Wiley's question
with the remark, "Confederate soldiers were too
much gentlemen to stoop to such things."

A tendency exists today to draw the same
conclusion about the men of blue as well as gray.
Sexual misconduct seems inconsistent with the
high drama and incredible courage so indelibly a
part of the war that created the modern United
States, and with the wholesomeness, the sublimity,
displayed by the two most exalted (and representa-
tive) figures in that conflict, Abraham Lincoln and
Robert E. Lee.

Such visions warm the heart. Yet in the Civil
War years, heat came from other, less spiritual
sources.

Wiley and subsequent historians who have
delved into the lives of Civil War troops have known
that those men were normal, sexually potent
males, that war breeds all kinds of heavy passion,
that Johnny Rebs and Billy Yanks of the 1860's
really differed little from servicemen past, present
and future in basic morality.

But writing at length on sex in the Civil War
poses difficult problems. Source material is scarce;
what does exist is too often of questionable validity.
A soldier writing his brother about a wild weekend
in Richmond is one thing, but hearsay testimony
concerning a prostitute's diary is something else
entirely.

Give Thomas P. Lowry credit for effort. Dr.
Lowry, a psychiatrist, has combed books, articles,
newspapers and a heavy sprinkling of manuscript
sources to produce the first study of sexual behav-
ior associated with the Civil War. "The Story the
Soldiers Wouldn't Tell" is a work that startles,
tickles, entertains and enlightens.

Dr. Lowry shows the extent to which pornogra-
phy, rape, contraception, abortions and general
promiscuity — in evidence since colonial days —
blossomed in the 1860's. Prostitution receives a
great deal of his attention, and well it should. By
1863, more than 7,500 ladies of the night were plying
their vocation in the greater Washington area and
New York City, according to one minister, had
more prostitutes than Methodists.

A result of this ancient recreation was a gen-
eral outbreak of venereal disease. Since treatment
in Civil War times ranged from applications of
pokeweed and sassafras to cauterization of the
lesions, the plagues went unchecked. However, the
claim of one writer, noted by Dr. Lowry, that a third
of the ex-soldiers who died in veterans' homes were
victims of syphilis or gonorrhea is a statement
midway between insulting and preposterous.

While mention of homosexuality by Civil War
soldiers is extremely rare, Dr. Lowry is convinced

James I. Robertson Jr.'s most recent books are
"Soldiers Blue and Gray" and "Civil War: America
Becomes One Nation."

that it did exist to a larger degree than has gener-
ally been assumed. The poet-nurse Walt Whitman
becomes the author's case in point.

Profligate commanders rate a separate chap-
ter (appropriately entitled "Generals Nuisance").
Although Gen. Joseph Hooker's last name was not
the origin of the well-known synonym for prosti-
tute, his sexual appetites were wondrous. H. Judson
Kilpatrick, who rose to the rank of major general in
the Union Army, kept at least one woman of easy
virtue with him in the field. The inimitable New
York politician Daniel E. Sickles was notorious
even before the war. In 1858 he killed his wife's
lover in cold blood but "escaped the gallows," Dr.
Lowry notes, "by the first American usage of a plea
of temporary insanity." During the war he became
a general and managed to lead his Federal corps to
near-disasters in two major battles, most notably
at Gettysburg. He lost a leg in the process but,
undeterred, found solace through an open affair
with the Queen of Spain.

WHAT restricts Dr. Lowry repeatedly
are the Victorian ideals and the Protes-
tant conservatism so powerfully im-
planted in Civil War generations. When
people did stray from the straight and narrow, few
of them acknowledged it and fewer boasted of it.
Hence the slimness of evidence forces the author to
be episodic at times. He presents a case as far as
extant facts permit and then leaves the reader to
draw his or her own conclusions as to outcome or
truthfulness.

A dubious Dr. Lowry considers whether Lin-
coln might have been gay and whether Stonewall
Jackson fathered an illegitimate child. In the first
case, the evidence that has been cited in the past is
shady wording in an otherwise innocuous

*Pornography, rape,
contraception and general
promiscuity, long a part of
American life, blossomed
during the war years.*

account of Lincoln's close friendships with young
men, in particular his relationship in the 1840's with
Joshua Speed. "Most Lincoln scholars," Dr. Lowry
observes, "believe that he was closer to Joshua
Speed than to any other person, male or female, in
his life." But the exact nature of their friendship, as
represented by such evidence as "the plaintive and
tender letters exchanged between Lincoln and
Joshua Speed when each took the momentous step
of marriage," lies "utterly beyond either proof or
disproof," Dr. Lowry concludes. In the second in-
stance, the accusation against Jackson consists of
an unsupported allegation in a note attributed to
Gen. Ezra A. Carman stating that while Jackson
was a cadet at West Point "he seduced a young girl
... and the result was a child, which Jackson
acknowledged." "Caveat lector," Dr. Lowry coun-
sels in this matter.

Dr. Lowry has laid out an impressive banquet
of facts and salty anecdotes. Writing with both
medical knowledge and a physician's detachment,
he has produced an upright study of a usually
prostrate subject. Such is a rarity in literature. □

FWNS
12-26-94

Sex plentiful in Civil War

► One soldier dubbed it "horizontal refreshments."

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thomas P. Lowry set out to explore more deeply the human side of the Civil War, to take figures remembered in bronze and stone and put more flesh and blood on them. Well, flesh, anyway.

The war, it turns out, was a battle of the blue and the gray and the bawdy.

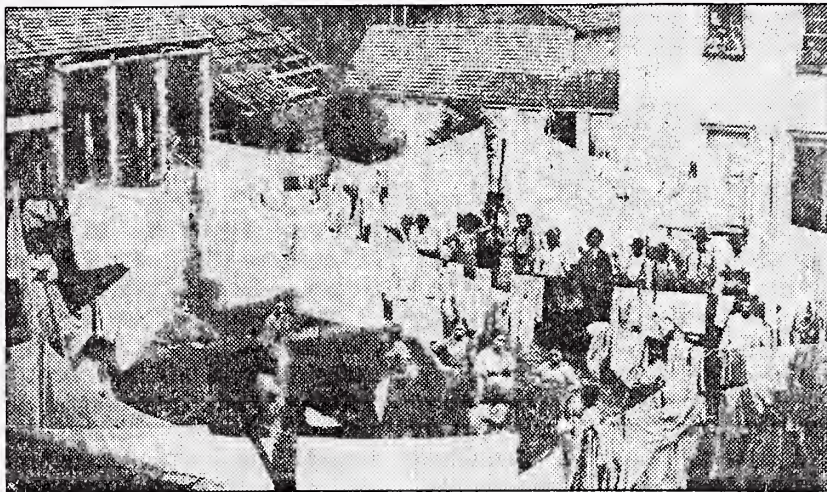
In his book "The Story the Soldiers Wouldn't Tell: Sex in the Civil War," Lowry leaves no doubt there was plenty of it — tender, inventive, violent, much of it bringing awful disease, the sum of it making more bearable the deprivations of the time.

Prostitution was rampant, even licensed by the Union in Memphis, Tenn., and Savannah, Ga. Men went to battle with pocket pornography disguised as Bibles. "Amours with the Nuns" was one hit.

"I tell you," one private wrote to a buddy about the pleasures of Washington. "Lager Beer and a horse and buggy and, in the evening, Horizontal Refreshments."

Across the Potomac, a Union soldier found his encampment near Alexandria, Va., a "perfect Sodom" surrounded by bordellos.

Lowry, a psychiatrist at the University of California, said the Civil War is "our holy war, our jihad," a



From The Associated Press

This hospital for prostitutes, one of several overseen by Major General Joseph Hooker during the Civil War in Washington, D.C., was a hotbed of activity — even during the day.

conflict filled with characters bigger than life. His scholarly work goes beyond that to paint a portrait of a time when men acted like men and so did some women.

New York Gen. H. Judson Kilpatrick scandalized many with his female companions dressed and disguised as men. "Charley" was a favorite. Gen. L.G. Estes went from camp to camp with "Frank."

Then again, men dressed as women for parties. Oblique references to possible homosexual trysts were hard to pin down because cramped soldiers innocently "slept together" a lot.

Northerners appeared more sexually active than Southerners, in

part because Confederates were so often on the march while Union soldiers spent more time in tents, Lowry said. He once read a historian's remark that the story of Civil War sex would never be told because so many records had been destroyed.

"He was mostly right," Lowry said, "but I managed to find enough for a book."

Sex on the road, meanwhile, could come at a terrible cost.

The surgeon general reported 103,000 cases of gonorrhea and 73,000 cases of syphilis among Union soldiers.

Disease declined when the Union began licensing prostitutes and giving them medical tests.



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BEAUREGARD
PIERRE G.